

Colby, In Out of the Cold, Discusses C.I.A.'s Problems

The following article was written by John M. Crewdson and is based on reporting by him and Nicholas M. Horrock.

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 3—One week after the Senate's confirmation of George Bush as Director of Central Intelligence ended William E. Colby's 25-year-long career as a spy, Mr. Colby relaxed in the sitting room of his modest suburban home and talked about "the elephant."

The temporarily unemployed private citizen used the term to describe the Central Intelligence Agency, which he headed for the last three years, but not in the same context as Senator Frank Church, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, who previously likened the agency to a "rogue elephant" running wild beyond the control of the White House.

Rather, Mr. Colby said, the public confusion about the C.I.A. that has grown out of a year of investigations by Mr. Church's committee and others, and revelations by the new media reminded him of the Hindu fable about the six blind men who, each feeling a different part of an elephant, came to very different conclusions about its nature.

The retired 56-year-old intelligence chief told his interviewers that he wanted to keep both his secrecy agreement with the C.I.A. and "my pension," and he declined to an-

swer for the record a number of questions about sensitive agency operations.

But Mr. Colby did agree to talk about some of the agency's current public difficulties which, he said, are as much a product of sensationalism and a lack of perspective by its critics as of the agency's own transgressions.

Mr. Colby, who was wearing a rumpled burgundy pullover and paused occasionally to sip coffee, reiterated his concern that recent news reports disclosing covert C.I.A. operations in Italy, Angola and elsewhere had provided foreign intelligence services with previously unknown details about the American agency's clandestine activities.

But he also said that, although such operations had dominated the newspaper headlines and television newscasts, they had typically accounted for only "about 5 percent" of the C.I.A.'s total expenditures.

It is the remainder of "the elephant," Mr. Colby said, that he hopes to portray in a book about the agency that he is planning to write.

Asked about the C.I.A.'s use of journalists to gather intelligence—a topic that, along with covert operations, has created a furor in recent weeks, Mr. Colby rolled his eyes skyward for a moment, then replied emphatically that the C.I.A. had never "engaged in an effort to manipulate the American press."

That last five correspondents

for major American news-gathering organizations who served the C.I.A. as clandestine agents were "phased out" beginning in late 1973, he said, and by the end of 1974 all had severed their relationships with the C.I.A. "At no time," Mr. Colby added, were any of the five, or their uncounted predecessors, told "what to write for an American journal."

He conceded, however, that, under the agency's current regulations part-time or freelance correspondents abroad who might at times sell articles to American publications were continuing in some cases to gather intelligence for the C.I.A. on the side.

Asked whether the agency had ever planted stories with foreign news organizations, Mr. Colby replied, "Oh, sure all the time." He also conceded the possibility that such bogus news accounts might have been picked up and reprinted by American newspapers, although he said he believed the effect of that on domestic opinion would have been marginal.

A General Reluctance

Mr. Colby cited a concern among journalists about the effect of such relationships on the integrity of their profession as indicative of a general reluctance on the part of other domestic groups, and even some Government agencies, to enter into close contacts with the C.I.A.

The State Department, he said, is reconsidering the advi-

sability of allowing C.I.A. officers to pose as diplomats assigned to American embassies abroad, and some private companies have withdrawn from arrangements in which C.I.A. men passed themselves off as corporate employees overseas.

In addition, Mr. Colby said, it is now more difficult to solicit interviews with businessmen and others returning from travels abroad about conditions in the areas of the world they had visited.

"Everybody agrees that we ought to collect intelligence," Mr. Colby said with a rueful smile. But he added that many persons and business concerns had lately adopted an attitude of "don't look at us" when approached by the C.I.A. with a request for assistance, and that, as a result, "We're missing information."

Distressed About Helms

Mr. Colby also expressed his distress about the possibility that Richard M. Helms, who headed the C.I.A. from 1966 until 1972, might be indicted by a Federal grand jury in connection with some of his activities as director of the agency.

One of the matters under investigation, Justice Department sources have said, is Mr. Helms's sworn assurance to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the C.I.A. had not given financial support to opponents of the late Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens, former President of Chile, and had not engaged in the surveillance of

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American citizens protesting against the Vietnam war.

The other subject of the Justice Department's concern involved Mr. Helm's authorization nearly five years ago of a C.I.A. conducted burglary of a photographic studio in a suburb of Washington.

Mr. Colby said today that, although the C.I.A. had provided money to some Chilean organizations prior to the 1970 Chilean elections, he believed that a "narrow construction" of the questions asked of Mr. Helms in that area precluded the possibility that the former C.I.A. director, who is the United States Ambassador to Iran, had perjured himself.

Domestic Surveillance

Mr. Colby also said he believed that Mr. Helms had answered the Senate committee correctly with respect to domestic surveillance by the C.I.A., since the agency's role in what has become known as Operation Chaos, a Federal investigation of anti-Vietnam war groups in the late 1960's and early 1970's, had been confined, with only a small number of unintended exceptions, to finding links between protesters and foreign governments.

The burglary of the photographic studio, Mr. Colby maintained, had been mandated by Mr. Helms's responsibility to protect the C.I.A. security, and not with any criminal intent. Mr. Colby speculated that no criminal charges could be sustained in that case or in the only other area of C.I.A. activities that remains under Federal investigation—the 20-year program of opening mail between the United States and Communist countries.

Mr. Colby, a lawyer who has not practiced since the early 1950's, when he joined the C.I.A., said he planned to return eventually to the law after gaining admission to the District of Columbia bar and taking a "crash course" in legal developments over the last 25 years.

But the book will come first,

he said. The former C.I.A. director was seen a few days ago in a stationery store purchasing equipment for the temporary office he is building in the basement of his apparently unguarded home in Bethesda, Md., a Washington suburb.

Meanwhile, Mr. Colby seems like a man who is between trains, sitting at home on a snowy morning while his wife Barbara bustled around him. There is no Government car and driver any more, so he and Mrs. Colby debate over whether he should drive to a downtown luncheon engagement, whether he needs any cash, what time she can expect him home.

"And, oh," said Mrs. Colby, a bright, smiling woman, as her husband trotted down the stairs, "I need to ask him about shoe repair."

She paused and turned to a guest. "It's so strange to have him home," she said.